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SUBJECT: TURKEY AND IRAQ DISCUSS STEPS TO IMPROVE TRUCKER SECURITY

REF: 2004 ANKARA 6675

Classified By: Economic Counselor Thomas Goldberger for reasons 1.4 b & d.

1. (C) Summary: Iraqi and Turkish delegations met in Ankara December 29-30 to discuss implementation of agreements reached at the November 30 trilateral (U.S.-Iraq-Turkey) trucker security meeting. The Iraqis proposed a more eastern route for Turkish truckers driving from Zakho to Baghdad and pledged to keep the new route secure. They asked Turkish help to construct secure rest areas along the route and to establish a communications network for Iraqi forces responsible for trucker security. Turkish officials want out advice on the Iraqi proposals and want to hold the next trilateral meeting in February. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Iraqi and Turkish delegations met on December 29-30 to discuss ways to implement agreements reached at November 30 trilateral (U.S.-Iraq-Turkey) meeting on trucker security. According to Sedef Yavuzalp of the MFA's DG for Economic Issues, which organized the meeting, the two sides focused on three issues: agreeing on a secure route from the Turkey-Iraq border to Baghdad, constructing secure rest areas for drivers along the route, and establishing a communications system for Iraqi forces coordinating security for the drivers. The Iraqi delegation was led by Baghdad's Ambassador to Ankara Sabah Omran and included representatives from the Interior Ministry, Defense Ministry, Foreign Ministry, the Ibrahim Khalil border facility and the Iraqi Chamber of Trade and Industry. The Turkish side was led by MFA Director General for Economic Affairs Oguz Ozge.

3. (C) Safe Route: The Iraqi side reported that the current route used by truckers -- through Mosul and Tikrit is unsafe and Iraqi officials could not ensure security along this route. They recommended that the truckers use an alternative route, from the border town of Zakho through Dohuk, Erbil, Altin Kopru, Kirkuk, Tuz, Khalis to Baghdad and pledged to keep this route secure.

4. (C) Rest Areas: The Iraqi delegation asked Turkey to build trucker rest facilities on the alternative route at Daraman and El-Adaim, and to renovate a facility at Faida. Turkish officials have not yet approached Turkish firms about their interest in these projects.

5. (SBU) Communications: The Iraqi side asked for Turkish help in establishing a network of military-type radios dedicated to providing secure communications for Iraqi forces responsible for maintaining security of the truck route and to communicate with truckers. Turkish officials responded that a GSM-based communications system might make more sense.

6. (C) Security: Iraq officials explained that security for Turkish drivers along the new route would be guaranteed by Iraqi security forces. Interior Ministry forces would provide escorts for truck convoys and would secure rest facilities. The Defense Ministry would be responsible for patrolling the truck routes. The two sides agreed to ask MNF-I to provide helicopter support for the truck routes.

7. (C) The Turkish delegation complained that fees collected by Kurdish officials at the border are a major irritant and cost for truckers and pointed out that such fees are not collected at other Iraqi border crossings. The Iraqis replied that any border fees must be approved by the central government in Baghdad and promised to look into the situation. The two sides also confirmed the need for a second border crossing.

8. (C) Comment: The focus on practical issues is welcome. Yavuzalp said that the trucker issue was one of the issues Foreign Minister Gul was one of the issues MFA staff recommended that Foreign Minister Gul raise with Deputy Secretary Armitage when they met in Ankara January 3, but

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apparently he did not. Turkish officials are seeking U.S. advice about the Iraqi recommendations. They also want to schedule the next trilateral meeting on trucker security in February.

19. (U) Baghdad Minimize considered.
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